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THE AGRARIAN MOVEMENT IN THE NORTHWEST

In the summer of 1916 the Farmers' Non-partisan Political League of North Dakota nominated a complete state ticket. In the November election that year this same league elected the governor and all other state officers, save one; also three of its candidates for justices of the supreme court (the court consisting of five judges); a safe majority of the house of representatives of the state; and nearly all of the candidates for the four-year term in the senate. Since state senators are elected for four years, one half retiring every two years, it is obvious that the league was now put in complete control of the executive and judicial branches of the state government and would have been in complete control of the legislative branch had it not been for the "hold-over" senators.

Why this sudden flare-up of agrarian discontent? What has it accomplished thus far? What is the outlook for the future of this movement? These questions deserve consideration.

To those acquainted with economic, social, and political conditions in the grain-growing section of the Northwest during the past dozen years it was evident that the stage was all set for this movement several years ago. The genesis of this movement is both easy and interesting to trace.

Economic, Political, and Social Conditions

The "Northwest," in the narrow sense in which it is used in this article, means that "hard spring wheat" district of which North Dakota is the center, and which includes, therefore, the three Canadian prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, as well as parts of the states of Montana, South Dakota, and Minnesota. The economic life of this region is very simple. It is all based on wheat. The banks, the railroads, the few simple industries of the villages and cities are all dependent on the wheat crop for their very existence. It is a one-crop section. It is therefore a section of large farms. Local flour mills have not been developed to form a market for this grain. In Kansas, in contrast, which is the leading wheat state, local flour mills buy the bulk of the crop. But the North Dakota wheat crop not only goes far to market, but goes into another state. It finds its way to the great mills of Minneapolis or to the exporters at Duluth. And in Canada the wheat fields are even

farther from the market, which is Winnipeg. A market so far away from the farmer gives rise in him to two powerful psychological conditions concerning this market—ignorance and superstition. The evils in the terminal market machinery—and no market machinery is perfect—become magnified manifold. Again, in this Northwest, where land is plentiful and cheap, capital is scarce and interest rates are high. The farmer is pioneering under hard conditions; and yet, although a high per cent of the farmers succeed, a small margin more or less in the price of his one crop may mean the difference between paying his mortgage or being closed out, between success or failure.

The social life of the farmer is not one of isolation, but just the reverse. He has more neighbors than has his New York City cousin. The wheat farmer is busy only at seeding time, and at harvest and thrashing time. He belongs to one or two farmers' clubs. He has one or two farm papers—real farm papers, that meet his local needs. He has his church papers and at least one daily paper. His mail is brought to him daily by the rural mail carrier. Every farmer, of course, has his rural telephone. He makes a weekly visit to the nearby village, or to the more pretentious "county seat" if he owns a Ford, and practically every prosperous farmer has his motor car. The winter season is long, but farm labor is lightest then, and this is the season for public meetings and conventions on every possible subject. This is the season when the farmers do most reading. A very considerable number of farmers move into town for the winter or even travel in the South. The dominating nationality in North Dakota is Scandinavian—particularly Norwegians, Danes, and Icelanders. This is a very substantial and thrifty stock. In their mode of thinking they are described, by their friends, as "independent" and "firm"; by their critics, as "radical" and "stubborn." In politics this element is without question absolutely independent, as was evidenced by the fact that for three successive terms they chose an Irishman for governor, who differed from them not only in nationality but also in religion and politics. Here was a strong Republican state honoring a Democrat with three terms in the executive chair. Following the administration of John Burke, the governorship fell into the hands of the Republican candidate once more, a prominent banker. As usually happens in such cases, the charge of representing the "old gang" was promptly brought against him. Vague though the charge was, it was des-

tined to come into use later with great force when the farmers' movement entered politics.

The Canadian provinces have, of course, the same economic environment as North Dakota. The political life for the past dozen years was very much the same there, the farmers feeling that their lawmakers came from urban communities and were, therefore, representative only of industrial, financial, and transportation interests. The social life in Canada, however, is made up of somewhat different race admixtures. Stock from the British Isles predominates, with the canny Scotch much in evidence. And a few hundreds of thousands of American farmers of our best and purest pioneering stock have emigrated to that section, becoming loyal Canadians. In short, western Canada is peopled with settlers of great physical, mental, and moral vigor.

This hasty sketch of the environment of the agrarian movement must necessarily omit all but the larger factors involved. It is pertinent to mention one other factor, however, which figures in the story; namely, the so-called "Twin City" rivalries which unhappily separate respectively Superior-Duluth and St. Paul-Minneapolis. Minneapolis and Duluth are important grain markets; Superior and St. Paul are not. The significance must be shown later.

Setting the Stage

The first step in setting the stage for the agrarian movement was to focus all discontent on the grain trade. This was not the task of any one man. Far from it. For instance, the bankers of North Dakota had an important part, unconsciously, in crystalizing sentiment on terminal grain market problems, particularly the terminal elevator question. Looking back over the field now it is easy to trace, step by step, the focusing of feeling on the grain trade. It will be necessary to trace side by side the Canadian and the American state of mind, and to contrast the "self-help" theory developed in one case with the "state-help" theory developed in the other case. To make the matter sufficiently concrete, dates and facts will be cited.

In Canada. A chronology of the Canadian feeling on the grain trade runs as follows:

1899.—Royal Commission appointed by the federal government of Canada to "investigate," and to "recommend legislation." The commission found that the grain outlet for western Canada

was over one railroad exclusively; that all country elevators were "line" elevators built on sites leased from this railroad; that farmers could not obtain cars to ship otherwise than through these elevators; that the farmer was forced to accept the weight, grade, dockage, and price offered him. In short, here was a complete and unregulated monopoly.

1900.—Manitoba grain act passed by federal government, providing for administrative regulation of the grain trade through a warehouse commissioner; also providing for loading platforms for farmers; but not requiring roads to furnish cars.

1901.—Farmers' Grain Growers Association organized in Saskatchewan, out of which movement later grew the United Farmers of Alberta and the Grain Growers' Association of Manitoba.

1906.—Royal Commission appointed by the federal government. Railways now forced to build loading platforms wherever ten farmers desire it and to furnish cars in turn, as shown by a "car-book" of requests at the local station. The car-book law worked, and that evil was cured.

1906.—Grain Growers' Grain Company organized. This company furnished a central selling agency for the Manitoba farmers. In the bumper crop year 1915-1916 this farmers' company handled 48,000,000 bushels of grain. It later (in 1917) amalgamated with the United Farmers of Alberta, assuming the name of United Grain Growers. The United Grain Growers own and operate 278 country elevators, and 3 terminal elevators. They have a paid-up capital of \$1,800,000 and a surplus of \$1,250,000. The company operates a coöperative supply department as well as a coöperative selling department, and now does the largest coöperative business on the American continent. It is an organization of farmers, on the self-help basis.

1906-1910.—Fight with the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. Farmers forced out of the exchange. They fight both in the courts and in the legislature. Both the Saskatchewan and the Manitoba farmers now have seats on this exchange and do business as the other members do. Harmony prevails.

1908.—*Grain Growers' Guide* is established as the official organ of the Grain Growers' Grain Company.

1910.—"Siege of Ottawa." Eight hundred farmers go in a body to Ottawa and present their demands for government-owned terminal elevators to Premier Laurier.

1910.—Manitoba government adopts policy of government-

owned country elevators. Policy is carried out by a corrupt government and the experiment becomes a costly failure. It is abandoned in 1912, and the farmers (Grain Growers' Grain Company) take over the houses on a lease.

1910.—Royal Commission, Province of Saskatchewan, known as the "Elevator Commission." This commission made one of the most comprehensive reports ever made on the grain trade, going at length into all the charges against the existing system of marketing grain. The country elevator problem is sharply distinguished from the other parts of the system. The Winnipeg Grain Exchange is considered a genuinely competitive market. The questions of terminal storage, mixing, sampling, and transportation, the commission leave to the federal Parliament. In the country elevator problem they weigh the two proposals of government ownership versus coöperative ownership. Ownership and management by the state they reject. Ownership and management by the growers of the grain they accept. Their scheme, involving financial aid from the province, was adopted, and the Saskatchewan Coöperative Elevator Company was organized. Farmers furnished 15 per cent of the capital and borrowed 85 per cent from the province. This coöperative company now owns and operates over 250 country elevators.

1912.—Canada grain act passed, providing federal inspection and federal regulation.

1914.—Royal Commission, Province of Saskatchewan, known as the "Grain Markets Commission." Their report covers the cost of marketing wheat, from the country elevator to the Liverpool market, and is designed to discover "ways and means for bettering the position of Saskatchewan grain on the European markets." Endorsement is given to coöperative ownership of country elevators, and to Dominion ownership of terminal elevators. The suggestion is also given that a watchful eye be kept on the large Dominion terminal elevator at Port Arthur, and on the farmers' coöperative terminal elevator at Fort William, in order to have "inside information" on these experiments.

Excited feeling over the grain trade in Canada gradually subsided after this last Royal report. Coöperation was now a going success. Other matters came to the fore. One more event of first magnitude must be chronicled before dismissing the Canadian aspect of the case. In 1910 the so-called Canadian Council of Agriculture was formed—an institution conforming in general

outline to what that able fighter, David Lubin, has so long wrought for in vain with us under the forbidding title of "Landwirtschaftsrat." The Canadian Council of Agriculture is composed of the executive officers of nine great farmers' organizations representing all the provinces from Ontario to Alberta. A permanent secretary maintains an office in Winnipeg. When the council was first organized, its attention was confined to the activities of the grain growers' movement. The council has encouraged the farmers to organize for the study of educational, economic, social, and political problems; it has constituted a medium through which its membership may act collectively; it has established a bureau for collecting and disseminating information on rural welfare; it has provided the machinery for formulating demands for legislation. In short, the council has secured wise leadership of the farmers, by the farmers, and for the farmers. It is therefore highly significant that when we turn to the "farmers' platform" adopted in 1917 by the Canadian Council of Agriculture, we do not find one word about the grain trade.

In the United States.—During these years, the same evils were complained of in the United States. A feeble attempt was made at coöperation, but no solution was found. Instead of a "Council of Agriculture" to produce leadership from the ranks of the thoughtful farmers themselves, we find a group of self-appointed leaders, non-farmers, taking advantage of the grain situation to organize a general movement for government ownership.

The growth of the "state of mind" on the grain question must now be chronicled for our Northwest, citing only a few of the better-known pieces of evidence. And, strangely enough, we may begin with the bankers—that conservative element in our civilization.

1906.—The North Dakota Bankers' Association send a committee to Duluth to investigate abuses in the grain trade there. The North Dakota bankers are the watchdogs of the farmers' economic welfare, and the grain trade is a matter of their most jealous care. Weighing, inspection, and grading, and other features of grain handling at Duluth are criticised, and these matters are brought officially to the attention of the next state legislature. It is only fair to state, in passing, that business interests in Duluth saw in this investigation some of the work of would-be rivals in the twin city of Superior. While this is not a pleasant matter to speak of, candor requires that it be mentioned.

1907-1915.—The Equity Society of Farmers. The bankers started the grain "fight," but it was the Equity Society that continued it with the farmers and made of it, in the end, a matter of such feeling and frenzy that it became a sort of religion. In the year 1907 there came into existence a selling association in the state of North Dakota, of members of the Society of Equity. This society aimed to foster coöperative grain marketing; but, unlike the Canadian movement, it adopted a highly decentralized and hence inefficient form of coöperation. This selling association first arranged to sell the grain consigned to it at Minneapolis, through a grain dealer there, Cooper by name. Later the association became incorporated, under North Dakota laws (1911), as a grain commission company, and assumed the name of The Equity Coöperative Exchange. Little attention was paid to this Equity "exchange" by the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce until August, 1912, when one George S. Loftus became its sales manager. This Loftus, since deceased, was by far the best known figure among the farmers of the Northwest, both by reason of his forceful and masterful personality and also the relentless vigor, bitterness, and recklessness of his fight against the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. Thanks to his pyrotechnic speeches about the country, the farmers gradually came to believe there was a "Grain Combine" (as Loftus always called the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce), and that the farmer was being robbed by it. At this juncture, it now appears that the Chamber of Commerce made a tactical blunder, for it began to fight back. On October 8, 1912, a resolution was passed prohibiting the members of the chamber from selling grain for any corporation, when by so doing the shipper of the grain would be required to pay a double commission, or be otherwise deceived as to the conditions under which such grain was sold. Since the Equity commission house was widely advertising itself as a "Grain Exchange" and was, in some cases, selling grain on a double commission (*i. e.*, through another commission house), this resolution did hit it with considerable force. The Equity, in 1914, moved over to the twin city of St. Paul and increased the fury of its fight against the Minneapolis institution. It is, of course, superfluous to add that in this warfare certain moral and financial assistance was rendered by the St. Paul business interests. The Equity now decided that its life depended on destroying the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and building up in the rival city

a new grain exchange. Water power made Minneapolis the world's greatest milling center. The mills and railroads made it a great grain market. Duluth is an export grain market by reason of the harbor on Lake Superior there. The Equity built in St. Paul a small terminal elevator, owned by the same corporation, which calls itself the "Equity Coöperative Exchange." This project was financed largely by farmers' notes. The Equity fight reached a dramatic climax at the 1915 session of the North Dakota legislature. It will be mentioned below in that connection.

1907.—North Dakota law creates Board of Grain Commissioners, in response to bankers' request, to investigate grain marketing in Duluth, Superior, and Minneapolis.

1907.—President Roosevelt's annual message refers to defects in inspection and grading of grain.

1908.—Report of Board of Grain Commissioners to the Governor of North Dakota. This report covers all steps in marketing, from country elevator to terminal elevator, and hence lacks dynamic power to focus attention on any one "evil."

1908.—London Corn Trade Association files formal complaint with the President of the United States against the "errors, or worse" in our inspection and grading of export grain.

1909.—North Dakota law provides for two grain commissioners to serve two years at the Minneapolis and Duluth terminals on the Minnesota Board of Appeals (in matters of grain inspection).

1910.—Report of above-named commissioners. This report discusses various terminal practices, but focuses on the terminal elevator question. By some ingenious calculations, figures are evolved showing that the state of North Dakota is losing \$5,500,000 a year by not having state-owned terminal elevators.

1912.—Constitutional amendment adopted in North Dakota, authorizing the state legislature to build state-owned terminal elevators in Minnesota or other states. This amendment had been pending four years.

1913.—North Dakota law provides that the State Board of Control shall investigate and report to the state legislature a concrete program for constructing and operating state-owned terminal elevators, and matters of interest relating thereto. Apparently the state is now committed to the policy of state-ownership. But note the report of this board in 1915.

1913.—Minnesota state legislature. Report of the com-

mittee of the house on its investigation of the Minneapolis grain market.

1913.—Minnesota state legislature. Report of the committee of the senate on its investigation of the grain market—particularly the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and the St. Paul Equity “Exchange.” This report is a back-fire against the house report mentioned above.

1914.—United States House of Representatives. Hearings before the Rules Committee (63 Cong., 2 Sess., H. Res. 424) under a house resolution which states, among other things:

Whereas, it is charged and generally believed that the price of wheat paid the farmers, as well as the cost of flour to the consumers is largely controlled by the Board of Trade of Chicago, the Chamber of Commerce of Minneapolis, and the Board of Trade of Duluth, acting in combination—

This document contains lengthy statements of the ultra-radicals. It had, for that reason, a promoted circulation in the Northwest, and the Congressional frank was utilized without stint.

1914.—Constitutional amendment adopted in North Dakota authorizing the state legislature to build state-owned terminal elevators within the state.

1915.—Report of State Board of Control (North Dakota legislature). The legislature is now in a mood to listen to plans for state-owned terminal elevators, prepared by the Board of Control—the board officially in charge of such business matters. The board brings in its report, discusses the policy—not the program—of state ownership, and comes out against the proposition. It has taken considerable courage on the part of the board to take this unpopular stand. It has, however, a majority of the legislature with it. But the vials of wrath of the farmer are now unloosed. The Equity Society calls a mass meeting at the state capitol, hoping to impress the legislators with the farmers’ demands. This society, oddly enough, while existing purely as a coöperative concern, is at this juncture ardent for state ownership. The Equity Society now brings to the mass meeting at the state house its ablest leader and bitterest fighter, Loftus. He excoriates the members, collectively and individually and by name, who have “deserted” the cause of the farmer. The audacity and vehemence of his abuse make of the episode one of the dramatic moments in the state’s history. Apparently the farmers’ long-

cherished dream of relief from the "grain combine" is crushed by an unfaithful legislature!

The Stage Is Set

If the reader has followed the discussion to this point, he is in a position to understand the state of mind of the Northwest farmers in the early part of 1915. The years of continuous agitation about grain marketing has now poisoned the minds of the farmers to any calm and temperate consideration of the question on its merits. It has become a "fight" against the "gamblers"; against "loot," "plunder," "gouge"; against the "Grain Combine." They are ready for a crusade. Many are even willing to arm themselves and literally fight for their "cause."

Enter the Nonpartisan League

And what solution is in sight? The Equity, unlike its coöperative Canadian cousins, is half for coöperation, half for state-ownership. Such leadership as this is impossible. There is no solution in sight. At this point enters the Farmers' Nonpartisan Political League. Its followers are farmers, waiting for leadership. Its leaders are not farmers. They are not chosen by the farmers; they are self-appointed.

North Dakota, although not an industrial state, had a strong Socialist party. Some villages had Socialist mayors. Out of this Socialist party came the leaders of the Farmers' Nonpartisan Political League. When promulgating socialism, these leaders preached the familiar doctrine that "labor produces all wealth," and all the rest of the conclusions that follow therefrom. When they saw the larger opportunity to organize the farmer, they changed the gospel to fit, making it "The farmer produces all wealth." But the immediate and concrete appeal was made in terms of grain. In condensed form and bold outline, it ran like this: You, Mr. Farmer—an old settler—were raising wheat thirty years ago? With your primitive equipment you could raise only 10 acres? You had plenty of clothes to wear—plenty to eat—more, in fact, than you now have! And now you are raising 100 acres of wheat! The question is, then, who gets that 90 acres of wheat? "Big business" gets it! The "Grain Combine" gets it! This specious argument, when cleverly handled, can be made very plausible, especially to those already predisposed to believe it. With this economic appeal came also the political

appeal, namely an assault on the so-called "Old Gang" in control of the political machinery of the state.

As mentioned above, the leaders in this new movement were the former leaders in the Socialist party of the state. We had no Council of Agriculture, as the Canadians had, to produce farmer leadership. Hence these leaders turned naturally to state-ownership rather than to coöperation when they devised a program of reform. They began their activities immediately upon the adjournment of the North Dakota 1915 legislature, while feeling among the farmers was white hot on the grain trade question.

League's Rise to Power

The first question for the league to solve was membership. In a strict sense of the word, the league was not "organized"; the originators of it took unto themselves the titles of "president," "vice-president," "treasurer," etc., and the farmers were then invited to "join." And during the first three years of the movement—1915, 1916, 1917—the same officers held these same offices by the same simple process. Nevertheless, the farmers "joined" very freely and looked on it as their movement. Solicitors were sent into the rural districts in automobiles and they made a house to house canvass of the farmers. The membership fee was six dollars. This entitled the farmer to receive a weekly paper, *The Nonpartisan Leader*, and a year's subscription to *Pearson's Magazine*. A socialist writer was brought from New York City to give the farmers, out of the abundance of his ignorance, expert advice on their economic ills and the remedy therefor, all of which appeared in a series of articles in the monthly magazine above mentioned. These articles, confessedly saffron in tone, helped boost the farmer movement—even though the magazine itself thereafter fell into a condition of death or suspended animation.

Selling league memberships to farmers on a commission basis was an exhibit of salesmanship. A small army of solicitors soon took the field. They were of various classes—young preachers without pulpits, young lawyers without briefs, office-holders without offices, students who were familiar with the book agent's life, disaffected persons and, of course, some who were working with sincere and non-commercial motives. The membership was thus raised to 40,000. But, before this happened, the membership fee was raised to \$9. Farmers joined just as fast; and the com-

missions were larger for the solicitors. The fee was then raised to \$16, this covering membership for two years. No exact statement can be given as to the amount of money collected or as to the amount expended, for during the first three years of the movement none of these things were made public. Enough to state that the "officers" had the disposition of the funds in their own hands. The president of the league went into bankruptcy proceedings in the fall of 1917, at Bismarck, North Dakota, claiming to have assets of less than five hundred dollars.

By the spring of 1916 the league in North Dakota was strong enough to enter politics. That state has a complete primary election law, abolishing the caucus system of nominations, and nominating all candidates by direct vote of the people. The league revived for its own use the secret caucus. Members met in the various voting precincts; non-members were not permitted to participate. Candidates for the state legislature were thus nominated. Candidates for the executive offices and the supreme court were chosen, ostensibly, at a "State Convention" of members, held in Fargo, April 1, 1916. In fact, this convention did not nominate; it ratified the candidates selected by the leaders. Enemies of the league denounced this procedure as a "machine" akin to that of the old days. But the farmers gleefully endured these gibes, since it was their own machine. And it worked, too, much to the discomfort of the older politicians, much to the joy of the farmers. Of course, the regular primary elections were held in June according to state law. But the farmers' vote, plus the labor vote of the villages and cities, actually nominated every candidate previously named by the league. And at the polls in November the voters elected all these candidates, save one—the state treasurer.

The league's platform, which was before the voters in 1916, includes these planks: state-owned terminal elevators; state-owned flour mills; state-owned packing houses; state hail insurance; and the single tax (in a modified form).

The league's rise to power in 1916 must be explained in large part in terms of wheat. And here nature and man worked together to help the league: nature by giving the state a crushing failure in its wheat crop; and man through the authoritative support given the league's wheat propaganda by the president of the state agricultural college. This man is a chemist, and, through his office as state pure food commissioner, he has gradually cre-

ated the impression among the farmers that he is their wise, brave, and infallible guide. He had already published one bulletin, *Is the Present System of Grading Wheat Equitable?* In the early fall of 1916, as the shrivelled and shrunken grains of North Dakota wheat began to flow to the Minneapolis market, instead of grading this wheat "sample" wheat—its official Minnesota grade—the dealers began to call it "feed" wheat, of the grades A, B, C, and D. Somebody made a most unhappy blunder, probably the editor of the *Grain Bulletin* of Minneapolis. Millers were grinding this wheat, light and chaffy as it was, blending it, of course, with heavier wheat. It was unfit for milling otherwise. But the dealers' name for it suggested the idea that it was good for "chicken feed," not for human food. The league made a slogan of "D Feed Wheat." And the president of the agricultural college, at this critical juncture, comes along with a new bulletin, *North Dakota Wheat for 1916*. In this pronouncement to the voters he speaks both as chemist and economist—as authority on the milling and baking tests of D Feed Wheat and also on its market value when milled; a clever combination of facts and assumptions. Flour was made from this wheat in the experimental mill on the campus; the flour was baked into loaves; the loaves were eaten. However, none of the flour was bought or sold on the market. The bulletin, nevertheless, gives the "per cent of gain" made by the Minneapolis millers when grinding the higher grades of wheat and also the so-called D Feed Wheat, the per cent being 21.4 for the best wheat and 111.9 for the D Feed Wheat. Although these market figures are all assumptions—and contradicted by the millers—the farmers accepted them as final and authoritative. And every farmer in the state was made entirely familiar with this D Feed Wheat story. With the help of this bulletin, the league's success at the polls was made doubly sure.

The League in Power

In January, 1917, the league came into power. It now had three of the five judges of the supreme court of North Dakota: the governor, attorney general, auditor, superintendent of public instruction, and other administrative and executive officers; the lower house of the state legislature, and nearly half of the upper house. One venerable judge, elected by the league to the supreme court, was known to be somewhat eccentric in his views and

habits. He very early broke away from league control, and showed himself independent, thus leaving the league membership in this court in the minority.

Lynn J. Frazier was the governor chosen by the league. He is an honest and thrifty farmer, a plain, blunt man, not experienced in public affairs, and thoroughly in sympathy with the league's program. He is a graduate of the state university, but stubbornly opposed to college fraternities and the new-fangled things which our young people have taken up. The superintendent of public instruction, likewise a graduate of the state university, a militant young Scotchman with a vision for a better rural school system, came into his office with an honest zeal for service. The attorney general, another state university graduate, a man of German parentage, brought to his office high ability, experience, and a will to do his duty. Among the other state officers were some of average ability, some of outstanding force, and a few weaklings.

Chief interest, however, centers in the state legislature. It was composed, quite naturally, very largely of farmers—and farmers unaccustomed to the mystery and confusion of American legislative procedure. But the league made provision for guiding the perplexed farmers through the mazes and perplexities. The league leaders rented a large hotel, and here the league legislators also had rooms; here a daily secret caucus was held; here instructions were given for voting on each bill. And, with only negligible exceptions, the league legislators followed the caucus instructions. The chief difference between this legislative caucus and the usual legislative caucus was that this caucus was dominated by men not members of the legislature.

But in the confusion and shuffle the original league program was partly lost to sight. As to state hail insurance, the state already had that, but not in a compulsory form. Before flour mills and packing houses could be built by the state, a constitutional amendment was necessary—a process requiring by one method nearly four years' time and by the initiative and referendum method several months' time. The league leaders decided to take the bull by the horns and enact a new constitution, as a statute is enacted; and hence the house passed such a measure, known among the farmers as "House Bill 44." The senate refused to support this revolutionary procedure, and the matter was thus blocked.

That left the one original issue still open—namely, the terminal elevator. Here the senate yielded, and a bill was passed providing for one state-owned terminal elevator. For reasons not yet clear to the general public, the league president pronounced the measure unsatisfactory—although the league legislators had supported it—and hence the governor vetoed it. The reason alleged was that the bill provided for paying for the elevator by taxation instead of by a bond issue.

The five original planks in the platform of the league failed to go into effect. However, many important and beneficial measures were passed, including a Torrens Title act, an Anti-Weed law, a law providing for school nurses. A law providing for inspecting, grading, and marketing grain was also passed, but its provisions are so loosely drawn that even its constitutionality is in doubt. Very little change was made in the tax laws.

In short, it may be fairly said that the output of this legislature was neither better nor worse than the output of the preceding legislatures. The methods used were similar to old-fashioned methods, except in this case the secret caucus was dominated by a small group of non-members, the leaders of the league.

In the failure of House Bill 44 the league had an alibi. The leaders at once went to the farmers, confessing they had accomplished little, but pointing to House Bill 44 as the excuse. "Next time—when we control the Senate—we'll do something," was the new gospel.

So the league at once began to lay plans to capture the 1919 legislature in North Dakota, and in the adjoining states. It now issued not merely a weekly paper, but acquired a daily. The farmers were to be "educated" with sound league doctrine. These two papers are usually spoken of as "League papers," but just where the title to this property is vested is not known by the general public.

The League in 1918

The league in 1917 moved its headquarters from Fargo, North Dakota, to St. Paul, Minnesota, and took on the title of "National." By January 1, 1918, the league organizers were busy in South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Montana, Idaho, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Colorado, Washington, Texas, and Oklahoma. It is impossible to give its financial condition or the size of its membership, since these are matters of a more or less secret nature.

The leaders of the league plan to invade every state; to secure a strong organization of the farmers, the labor unionists, and the socialists; and gradually to turn over to state ownership and operation all the more fundamental industries of the country. For the leaders of the league are at heart now what they were in 1914—socialist organizers. Their vision has merely widened enough to enfold the farmer in their scheme.

Much effort is being made to secure support from labor unions in the cities. Of course this brings up the economic problem—How raise prices to the farmer and lower prices to the city consumer? This problem has led the league a little afield from its original purpose—state-ownership. The “solution” of this problem now being offered by the league takes two forms: first, a somewhat vague promise to create “direct marketing” and to “eliminate the middleman”; second, a concrete program of so-called coöperative stores. These “coöperative” stores, now being organized in the Northwest, have collected from the farmers about one million dollars and their number is rapidly increasing. These are not coöperative stores at all, but a chain of stores owned and controlled by a small central corporation called the “Consumers United Stores Company.” The farmer gets no stock and no dividends, but his \$100 fee buys him a “membership” with the “privilege” of trading at these stores. Goods are promised him at wholesale plus freight plus a margin of “not to exceed 10 per cent.”

A pertinent question may be asked here: Did the Farmers’ Non-partisan Political League try to organize across the line in Canada? A group of sympathizers did start a nonpartisan league in one of the prairie provinces. This league became strong enough to nominate nine candidates for the provincial legislature. One of these nine was a man of outstanding ability who was endorsed by all parties. He was of course elected. The other eight candidates were defeated. This experiment was a fair test of the state of mind of the Canadian farmer, with his coöperative marketing machinery and his own Council of Agriculture.

No one can forecast with certainty the future of the league movement in the United States. The war has brought to the farmer a period of prosperous prices. The war has also cast some shadow of suspicion on the patriotism of the leaders of the league. In the June primary elections, the Minnesota voters overwhelmingly defeated the league on the loyalty issue, and the North

Dakota voters gave the league only a partial victory. The "coöperative store" movement walks on the edge of the abyss of failure. The bankruptcy proceedings of the organizer and president of the league is bound to tarnish his name among thousands of his soberer followers. The yoking up of an economic movement with a political party is likely to do in this instance what it has done in the past—wreck the movement. Since the passing of D Feed Wheat, the league lacks any central unifying principle. The huge funds collected by the league—and thus far unaccounted for—together with its political power, will inevitably bring to it new adherents who are merely seeking the loaves and fishes. It is therefore likely to go the way of the Farmers' Alliance.

So far as the league's past is concerned, to the extent that it is better to have the farmer awake than asleep, excited rather than apathetic, to this extent the movement has been a social benefit. To the extent that the movement has kindled class hatred, blind suspicion of commercial honor, prejudice against all so-called "big business," and unreasoned animosity towards all "middlemen," to the extent that it has promoted demagoguery and insincere leadership, and has set back the cause of self-help among the farmers, to that extent it has hurt the country.

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